

Why Bolshevism Failed in Hungary

THE primary cause is of course Allied hostility, the Allied blockade, and Allied intervention, but that need not be here discussed. Other factors of a more intimate kind helped to bring Bela Kun's Communist experiment to the ground. The first of these was the excessively proletarian character of Hungarian Communism. The second was the blockade of Budapest by the peasants—a blockade that still continues, is entirely non-political, and originates in the narrow egoism of the peasant mind anywhere and everywhere. A third, and less important cause was the sabotage of the upper bourgeoisie. Among the subordinate factors one might mention the dependence of Hungary's industrial life upon that of her neighbors, particularly Germany, for raw materials and certain essential industrial processes.

That Bela Kun was able to hold out for four months against this complex of difficulties was a miracle. This Jewish clerk had the miraculous gift of leadership as few popular leaders have had it; for the nearest parallel one must go to our revivalist preachers; he knew and played upon the mass psychology in politics as a Sankey or a Billy Sunday does with the religious emotions.

Hungarian Communism was by no means the farcical thing that hostile propaganda has made it out to be. Essentially it consisted of that compound of State and Guild Socialism, of a central bureaucracy and autonomous factory councils, towards which all Europe east of the Rhine seems to be tending. Every factory was controlled by its workers' council of three, five, or seven "shop stewards," but it was managed and run by the Production Commissioner, an expert appointed by the State Department of Production. The Commissioner was not supposed to be under the orders of the Worker's Council, and any dispute had to be referred to the central department. It was intended to preserve proper discipline and to give the right degree of authority to skilled knowledge and the communal representative.

It was Bela Kun's desire that the central department should have the deciding voice that the production commissaries should be men of expert ability, and at least some members of the workers' councils too should be experts. Nor was there any insuperable obstacle. The technical experts—engineers, chemists, foremen, and the like—lent themselves willingly to the task. Most of them did so perhaps because it was the only way of earning a living. Many, however, seriously accepted Communism as the only way out of Hungary's appalling difficulties.

Nor was the start altogether unpropitious. Things were done at a stroke which, for example, the clear-sighted bureaucrats of the Imperial Economic Ministry at Berlin frankly admitted to be necessary—the concentration of industry at a time when two-thirds of the factories were almost paralysed by lack of raw material, the elimination of useless factories, the cutting down of unnecessary establishment expenses. Big financial men proffered their advice, not for any doctrinaire belief in Communism—on the contrary, their antagonism remained—but in the patriotic belief that sound finance is necessary for any regime.

But everything was spoiled by the proletarian fury that rapidly roared up into white heat. Class hatred took the place of the communal spirit, and soon developed into a class terrorism. It is idle to apportion blame

From Viewpoint of a Radical Special Budapest Correspondent to Manchester Guardian Weekly.

for what happened. If there is any blame, it is upon the abominable social system that obtained in Hungary before the first or Karolyi revolution of October. Suddenly released from their political and economic slavery, the workers became intoxicated with a sense of power, and unfortunately they used their power to their own undoing.

They could not bring themselves to believe that these "intellectuals" were, after all, proletarian like themselves, men who worked for their livelihood, who loved their work, and whose work was indispensable. No; they were "bourgeois," black-coated, well fed, formerly privileged, and therefore were they suspect. Production commissaries who knew their business found themselves resisted and without authority. Ere long their place was taken by some demagogue from the ranks.

So with the central Productions Department. It became, or nearly became, for one must not exaggerate, a department of mob-orators. Some good men did remain. There were production commissaries who retained authority in their factories and did splendid work. There were factories—big ones, too—that functioned as admirably as if they were run by a board of directors. But these were exceptional instances. It is little wonder that the well-meaning intelligentsia—this useful and high-minded section—"downed tools" and adopted a passive sabotage.

No class in Hungary is more to be pitied. Under the Red Terror, which was none the less real, though it was not, despite all the propagandist reports, stained to any great extent by atrocities, this class suffered unjustly from proletarian distrust. To-day it is suffering equally unjustly under the White Terror for having attempted to do its duty to the community under the Bolshevik system.

In fairness, again, to the working class, it must be remembered that the new regime was fighting for its life against enemies within and without. Starvation saps any faith, and the workers needed exhortation as a patient in a hospital needs morphia injections. Mob-orators were poor works managers, but they were necessary stimulants to endurance. Without them the Bolshevik enthusiasm would soon have faded away out of pure inanition. They were to Bolshevik Hungary what the Puritan preachers were to Cromwell's army.

Of all these exhorters the prince was Bela Kun himself. Again and again he rallied the masses when they were all but lost to him by a hypodermic injection of his mob-oratory. Eventually even he failed, and the Red army melted away almost in a night. It was never defeated by the Rumanians. It was deserted by the workers in the rear when the strain had finally brought their nerves to the breaking-point.

Bela Kun was hampered throughout and finally borne down by the deadweight of the peasantry. The Hungarian peasant resembles the French peasant as described by Zola in "La Terre," narrow, suspicious, grasping, miserly. He has been neither pro-Bolshevik nor anti-Bolshevik, pro-Monarchist nor anti-Monarchist. His one political

potestiar is himself. If he does not always swing immediately true to this star, it is because he is momentarily deflected by his traditional religiosity and the influence of the priest. His habit of keeping a "stocking" has long been an embarrassment to Austro-Hungarian finance. Into the stocking he regularly has put by year after year the thick, blue-tinted notes of the Austro-Hungarian Bank—of 1,000 kronen denomination and less—until a vast proportion of the paper currency of the Dual Monarchy has thus accumulated and become stagnant.

Bela Kun's Government had to issue paper money, like any other Government. Had the printing press of the Austro-Hungarian Bank been in Budapest instead of Vienna, this would have been simple enough. As it was, the Soviet Government had to make the best imitation it could, and it was a very poor imitation.

All the stories about Bela Kun's forgery of foreign money, English bank-notes and the like, are the impudent invention of cheap journalism. He had not the resources or the skill to turn out Hungarian money, much less that of other countries. Indeed had it been possible to set a first-rate note forger to work on the national currency—and it is questionable how such notes would have been forgeries—the Soviet regime might have been saved. The Hungarian peasant refused to accept the new "white" money, so-called because it was white instead of blue-black. To him anything but the stiff, inctuous richblue notes to which he was accustomed was not money. He simply refused to sell, and the fatal blockade of the town by the country began. Only the few fortunate townspeople who had hoarded up a store of blue money or who had jewelry to sell could obtain food. The masses dependent upon daily, weekly, or monthly wages had only the new money, and had to starve in a land of plenty.

Nothing that Bela Kun could do, no measure was conceivable that could have shaken the peasant. Five years of unchecked profiteering at the expense of the city, the nation, and the neighboring countries had enriched the countryside. It had money enough, and in any case, thanks to the Allied blockade, the town had nothing to sell that the peasant wanted. And such is the egoism of the peasant—as Budapest in the last six months and Vienna during the last five years have shown,—so stubborn and insensible is he,—that he will calmly allow millions to starve rather than mitigate his greed. Sooner or later the peasantry, among whom are classed also the landowning class, would have brought Sovietism down in Hungary.

Among enlightened people here it is believed that in course of time Communism would have shed of its faults and have settled down into a fairly good working system, distinguishable perhaps only in psychology and name from that which will inevitably come throughout Central Europe. Experience has begun to teach the lesson that outside intervention brings only disaster in its train.

Anniversary Greetings from Russia

London, Nov. 7.—Bolshevik forces in Russia have advanced, during the last week, an average of thirty miles along fronts totaling from 250 to 300 miles. They are now moving forward on virtually every front.